

THE LIFE HISTORY OF A SPEECH COMMUNITY: GUUGU YIMIDHIRR AT HOPEVALE

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1 IS GUUGU YIMIDHIRR DEAD?

In late 1983, the linguist Noreen Pym visited the Aboriginal community of Hopevale, near Cooktown on the Cape York Peninsula, for four months. During two weeks of this time she carried out research on changes in the Guugu Yimidhirr language spoken there. In a paper called 'Observations on language change at Hope Vale',¹ Pym concludes that the Guugu Yimidhirr language '[t]oday . . . is spoken only by the elderly' (p.153). After describing the range of changes she detects in the speech of two anonymous women at Hopevale (which she contrasts with the 'traditional' form of Guugu Yimidhirr documented in an earlier description of mine)² she concludes (p.165) that 'Guugu Yimidhirr is in danger of disappearing completely'.

I spent several months at Hopevale at the end of 1984 without suspecting that Guugu Yimidhirr was on the brink of death, and I was thus surprised at Pym's findings from a year earlier. She found that Hopevale people, especially children and young adults, are unable to use Guugu Yimidhirr in most contexts and that their knowledge of the language is limited and imperfect. It seemed to me, on the other hand, that both Guugu Yimidhirr – albeit in a constantly changing form – and English – also changing from moment to moment – are both alive and well at Hopevale, and that they both have shared complementary roles in the communicative repertoires of all Hopevale people. The discrepancy between our impressions led me to ponder how two trained observers could have come to such different conclusions. Since both Pym and I hope that our research at Hopevale will have beneficial effects for the community (she characterises her paper as having been written 'for the people at Hope Vale'), I thought it might be useful to explore our different perspectives by examining language at Hopevale in a somewhat wider social and historical context.

Language and language policy are serious issues at Hopevale. Nonetheless, people both inside and outside the community have differing opinions about the place and nature of language in Hopevale life. A look at the development of the speech community may resolve, or at least locate with precision, some apparent contradictions and dilemmas. One irony is this: 1984 is not the first time an observer has claimed that English was taking over and Guugu Yimidhirr dying among the people of Hopevale or their forebears. Various observers, as I note below, have made the *same* claim repeatedly since before 1900! If Guugu Yimidhirr

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1 Pym 1984.

2 Haviland 1979a.

a hunter-gatherer traditional Aboriginal culture to being a settled European-style culture'. For a start, one could dispute the details of her observations. She claims, for example, that 'today no one uses a spear even for hunting' and that '[t]he traditional kinship system is largely gone' (p.156). Yet in my most recent fieldwork, even my *own* (fictive) kinsmen fed me on speared fish. However, the real danger comes in applying a simple and distorted model — of 'change' from 'traditional' life to modern settled Hopevale existence — to the complexity of the community's real history and evolution. Hopevale's past is a story of constant manipulation by outside forces (including deliberate imposition of language policies), extreme heterogeneity in the available linguistic varieties as well as the constituent population, and a range of experiences in different parts of wider Queensland society that produces, at the very least, different degrees of knowledge and competence in people's linguistic repertoires.

In what follows I will review the history of the Hopevale community with special attention to language issues. I will end by presenting samples of ordinary talk from modern Hopevale, using them to illustrate both variations in individual linguistic competence and the complex conditioning (and hence the inherent communicative value) of minute code switches within normal speech.

2 THE FOUNDING OF HOPE VALLEY MISSION.

The Hopevale community is a direct descendant of a Lutheran Mission, called Hope Valley, established in 1886 in the aftermath of the Palmer River goldrush³, at Cape Bedford, north of Cooktown.

People from around the Endeavour River spoke an identifiable form of modern Guugu Yimidjirr at least as early as 1770 when Lt. Cook and members of his crew collected a few words of their language⁴. About one hundred years later, gold was discovered on the Palmer, and the port of Cooktown was opened at the Endeavour mouth to supply the diggings. The resulting devastation of Aboriginal life was total. Within ten years, by the mid 1880s, the scattered remnants of the Cooktown Aboriginal tribes were in a sorry state, and both church and civil authorities began to take steps to organise Aboriginal lives on lines more amenable to European hopes and plans for the area. In 1886 the mission at Cape Bedford was begun by German Lutheran missionaries, with support from local police and the Queensland Government, as well as from missionary societies in South Australia and in Bavaria.

From the beginning, the language of the Aborigines was a central concern. In 1881 the Cooktown Police Magistrate recognised that using Guugu Yimidjirr (although, in those days, he knew no name for it, but only had 'some . . . boys who understand the language') was essential to induce people from the remote and scattered Aboriginal camps around Cape Bedford to come into Cooktown, where they might be put to some use about the town⁵. (The 'use' the Cooktown citizens had in mind turned out to center on unpaid domestic and bush labour, and sexual abuse.)

³ See Haviland and Haviland 1980 for a general account of the founding of the mission at Cape Bedford. Much of that account is relevant to the present topic. I will concentrate here the role of language in the development of the Cape Bedford community.

⁴ See Haviland 1974.

⁵ Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA) Colonial Secretary's Files (hereafter COL)/A314, No.2395 of 1881. Letter from St George (Police Magistrate) to Col. Secretary, 27 May 1881.

In the meantime, the early missionaries at Hope Valley found the task of learning Guugu Yimidhurr daunting and frustrating. In the first place, it was never clear to the missionaries *what* language they were supposed to be learning: the multiplicity of dialects and languages in the area led them to suspect that their Aboriginal informants were deliberately trying to confuse them.¹⁰ It is clear, both from contemporary sources and from the memories of Hopevale's oldest people, not only that distinct regional varieties of Guugu Yimidhurr existed, but that travel and contact between groups who spoke radically different languages characterised Aboriginal life before the European invasion. At least five major languages came into regular contact, from Guugu Yimidhurr and Gugu Yalanji in the south, to Barrow Point and Flinders Island languages in the north, and to the groups of languages, including those called Lama Lama along the coast of Princess Charlotte Bay, and Gugu Warra, inland. Given the clear existence of multiple dialects and languages, and the Aboriginal penchant for polyglot skills, there is reason to suspect that *ordinary* conversation in a 'traditional' context involved considerable language switching. The early missionary Pfalzer, and later the two Germans who spent the longest time at Cape Bedford, Missionaries Schwarz and Poland, alternately despaired at their inability to get on with preaching and explaining the Gospel because their own linguistic skills were inadequate,¹¹ and condemned Guugu Yimidhurr itself as conceptually impoverished, inadequate as a vehicle for religious instruction.¹²

The missionaries began teaching children at Cape Bedford to read and write in Guugu Yimidhurr (the children were pleased to find that paper could speak their language too),¹³ and they started translating hymns.¹⁴ Little by little the missionaries began to master difficult words, and Poland especially was diligent in trying to apply native concepts to Christian ideas.¹⁵ By 1889 he had decided that Guugu Yimidhurr, though, in his opinion, syntactically paltry, had both lexical and idiomatic richness, although the natives, he lamented, did not

¹⁰ Pfalzer writes, in a letter to his Bavarian Mission Society, reprinted in *Kirchliche Mitteilungen* (hereafter KM) 1887 No.10, that Police Inspector Marrett from Cooktown had confirmed that the Aborigines were deliberately using 'difficult words' and mixing words from two or three distinct dialects.

¹¹ Pfalzer, in a letter to the Inspector of February 1887, KM 1887 No.2 78-9, reports that the language has difficult sounds and is spoken rapidly, but that he feels obliged to learn the language quickly in order to transform 'a mob of cannibals [. . .] into civilized people'. Obviously impatient, he complained in December of the same year, KM 1887 No.3, that 'one of the worst difficulties is that one's language skill simply is not up to' spiritual topics. Schwarz, on arrival at Cape Bedford, writes to the Inspector that he feels 'useless' without the language (KM 1887 No.9). And Meyer, at Bloomfield, admits in a letter to Rechner (LCA 1.1 Sept. 1889) that one has to be constantly on guard against committing howlers in translating. His imperfect knowledge of Gugu Yalanji led him to translate the commandment 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' as 'Thou shalt not marry'.

¹² Pfalzer is at first convinced that Guugu Yimidhurr has 'no spiritual words' (KM 1887 No.2 78-79, Oct. 1886), and later comes to feel that his working wordlist of 400 to 600 words represents probably one third of the entire Guugu Yimidhurr vocabulary (KM 1888 No.9). (My working glossary for Guugu Yimidhurr contains well over 3,000 roots.) In a retrospective look at the mission effort after more than ten years of work, the founder, Johannes Flietl, reports in KMZ 30 No.11 (June 1898) that Guugu Yimidhurr lacks words for spiritual or intellectual discourse, as was to be expected from people 'living on such a low cultural level'.

¹³ Pfalzer letter to Inspector, 12/1887, ND 92-93.

¹⁴ Poland letter to Inspector 10/1886, ND 188-189.

¹⁵ Poland's report (9/1888, reprinted in KM 1888 No.12) to the 'Red School' (a sponsoring primary school in Germany) makes heavy use of Guugu Yimidhurr words to describe life and social relations. (Footnote 13 continued on next page)

throughout Queensland. The Northern Protector of Aborigines, Dr Walter E. Roth, began a serious study of native custom. He also carried out surveys of the dialects spoken in the hinterlands north of Cooktown,²³ relying heavily on the knowledge and experience of the Cape Bedford Missionaries in his published description of the 'Koko Yimidir' language.²⁴ Much of Roth's ethnological and linguistic observations convey a sense that the languages and customs of the northern Aborigines were fading and endangered. In 1900 Roth notes that 'now that a provisional schoolteacher has been appointed' to Hope Valley, 'the instruction in and of the English language has commenced. Hitherto all teaching had been imparted in the local Koko-Yimidir dialect'.²⁵

Five years later, Roth sounds a refrain which will continue for the next eighty years: 'English in place of the local Koko-Yimidir dialect, is becoming more and more generally spoken [at Cape Bedford]'.²⁶ But the tension between English and native tongues remains: while learning English is a desirable sign that Aborigines can become both civilised and useful, Roth suggests in his annual report for 1902 that it can also indicate their loss of an *appropriate* place in society. He describes the removal of several people who had previously been brought from Proserpine to Cape Bedford, when the Lutheran Marie Yamba mission closed.

Seven adult malcontents had subsequently to be returned to Bowen: those spoke English very well and were cheeky enough for anything; they had evidently been too much encouraged in competition with Europeans in the way of cricket matches etc., and had been treated socially far above their natural station in life . . .²⁷

English and uppitness go together. So too do one's language and one's identity. In the same report, Roth decries the trade in native children, from which:

. . . prostitution and disease follow, they can only speak pidgeon English, and finally become pariahs among both whites and blacks .²⁸

Subsequent Protectors of Aborigines were to express an official preference for Aborigines who spoke English (and acquired skills of some use to European society). Protector Howard, for example, was more impressed by the girls of Cape Bedford than the boys, since the former were asked to do housework for the missionary and thus spoke better English.²⁹ The

²³ QSA Comm. Pol. 142 No.2, letter from Roth to Commissioner of Police 24 June 1898.

²⁴ Roth 1898 and Roth 1901 (QNPA).

²⁵ QNPA Report for 1899.

²⁶ Chief Protector of Aborigines (hereafter CPA) annual report for 1905, p.24, Roth to the Under Sec. of Public Lands.

²⁷ Roth's annual report for 1902, in Queensland Parliamentary Papers (hereafter QPP) 1903. When Poland returned to Cape Bedford about five years later, after a prolonged furlough in Germany, he found that the Marie Yamba people who had *remained* at Hope Valley now had all learned Guugu Yimidhrr. Poland letter to Inspector, July 1907, ND 539-540. The late George Bowen, one of these people from Marie Yamba and later one of the most influential and respected people at Hopevale (where he was known simply as *warrga* 'the great'), told me that he learned Guugu Yimidhrr in about six weeks. Even in the 1970s he also remembered some of his own language from around Proserpine.

²⁸ Roth's annual report for 1902, QPP 1903.

²⁹ Howard's report for 1909, CPA 1910.

The influx of children from outside the mission continued through the 1920s. During this time, Hope Valley suffered from pressing financial problems, leading Schwarz to open several outstations where families of adult Aborigines tried to subsist on their own farming efforts. Schwarz's reports during this time emphasised the progress in English that the school-children were making. When, in 1924, the Lutheran authorities considered turning control of the mission over to the (Anglican) Australian Board of Missions, Schwarz's strongest objection was that the people had insufficient English to survive the transition to someone else's ministrations.

To 90% of our people, a lecture or a sermon in English would have no more value than if it was delivered in Chinese. Most of our older people (and certainly some of our best) Christians can hardly speak a word of English [. . .] The younger generation certainly know SOME English [. . . but their total vocabulary] if written on fine paper could easily be put in a nutshell (a walnut not a cocoanut).³⁵

Dr F.O. Theile, then the head of the Lutheran Mission Board that oversaw Cape Bedford, and a distinguished historian of the Lutheran church offered the following detailed linguistic profile of the community after a visit in 1926:³⁶

I was impressed with the painstaking efforts which both teachers expend on the need of proper understanding of every word spoken and read. In school the language used is English, though even here the native language has often to be resorted to explain the matter in hand.

Theile notes that girls (although not boys) especially love to read, and should be provided with suitable materials from the *Lutheran Herald*. Theile discusses the linguistic skills that would be required of a new missionary for Hope Valley — Schwarz had threatened several times to resign and was by this time nearly sixty years old — saying that, while English would be useful,

full knowledge of English is not absolutely essential as the Koko Yimidir language would have to be acquired in any case [. . .] The older inhabitants of the Mission Reserve, especially the married couples on the [outstation at the] McIvor River, understand no other language. They have all learnt English in school years ago, but they have forgotten it again. The men may be able to understand what is most familiar and necessary to them in English, but neither they nor their wives can follow the word of God and a sermon in that language. They conduct all their services and devotions in Koko Yimidir. The younger generation is somewhat better versed in English and their Sunday services are conducted in English, and though they sometimes sing Koko Yimidir at their devotions, they read their scripture lessons from the English Bible. Still, it is noticeable more so among boys and young men, than among the girls and young women that Koko Yimidir is easier to them, and that it conveys more to their understanding than the English. In short, their mothertongue, the language in which they think is Koko Yimidir. In school, the language used is English, though even here the native language has often to be resorted to explain the matter in hand.³⁷

³⁵ Schwarz letter to Theile, August 1924, LCA 3.

³⁶ Theile 'Report on Visit to Hope Valley July 1926', LCA 11 No.1, 27 July 1926.

³⁷ Ibid.

It seems clear that after fifty years of continuing evolution, the Cape Bedford community had by the beginning of World War II, developed a clear linguistic division of labour. Schwarz, always a believer in a kind of rough closeness with his charges through shared language and work, and fluent in conversational Guugu Yimidhurr, nonetheless reserved for English certain functions, especially in relation to religious ideas. This asymmetry was preserved in Schwarz's translations of Bible stories and hymns, along with the peculiarities of his Guugu Yimidhurr itself (heavily accented, and largely dependent on a vocabulary learned in his early years among the coastal people at Cape Bedford).⁴⁴ Schwarz himself put the matter this way:

There are of course words in the Bible which cannot be translated into Koko Yimidir on account of the absence of the corresponding ideas and meanings in this language. In my translations I had the option either to use the English words with which of course all those who have grown up on the station are fairly familiar, or else make use of a long circumlocution.⁴⁵

4 DIASPORA – THE EVACUATION TO THE SOUTH.

The first years of World War II were difficult times at Cape Bedford. Resources were scarce, and the needs of the mission community were growing. Rev. Schwarz, with occasional help from assistant missionaries and lay workers, but relying most heavily on a few Aboriginal families on whom he placed considerable responsibility, had tried to establish a succession of new stations and farming operations on the limited terrain of the mission Reserve.

The War came closer, however, and in 1942 the entire population of the mission was, without warning, suddenly evacuated, transported to the Aboriginal settlement at Woorabinda, inland from Rockhampton. Rev. Schwarz himself was interned in a camp for German aliens, and was, thereafter, not allowed to return to his congregation of, by then, fifty-six years. The experience of the next eight years in the south was both traumatic and liberating for the people from Cape Bedford. Their numbers were dramatically and suddenly reduced by disease. Woorabinda left them disoriented and exposed, for the first time in their lives, to unmediated contact with the outside world. People went to school in ordinary schools, had paid employment, travelled on 'manpower' gangs, mostly to do agricultural labour throughout the south, and met and interacted with a wide range of unknown, new people, both black and white. They also struggled, through the efforts of a few influential elderly people (Schwarz's chosen responsible helpers, largely), to keep alive the possibility of returning to their own country again.

When they arrived at Woorabinda, into an unambiguously English-speaking world, the existence of Guugu Yimidhurr in their linguistic repertoires took on an entirely new significance. In the first place, the fact that they had 'language' further marked them off from the people of Woorabinda, a separation that had both positive and negative aspects. The Cape Bedford people, whether at home on the settlement or on work gangs away from Woorabinda, shared not only membership in an exiled mission community but also a private mode

⁴⁴ As I have noted elsewhere, the written Guugu Yimidhurr of Schwarz's translations, probably ungrammatical and certainly idiosyncratic, has become 'enshrined as a kind of semi-official church language' (Haviland 1979a, p.230) which people cannot easily understand, but which has power and legitimacy as a special code, much like the archaic English of an old Bible.

⁴⁵ 1939/12 Schwarz letter to Stolz, 29 December 1939, LCA No.1.

The Lutheran church ultimately did publish the Guugu Yimidhirr *Order of Service*⁵⁰ which was distributed to the Cape Bedford people at Woorabinda on May 27th, 1946.⁵¹ In subsequent years, both the provisional Lutheran mission in the area, and a Woorabinda schoolteacher, expressed their interest in materials that would help them to learn Guugu Yimidhirr in order to communicate better with the Cape Bedford people.⁵²

5 RETURN TO HOPEVALE.

It is eloquent testimony to the Cape Bedford people's loyalty to their own country that they ultimately succeeded, at the end of the 1940s, with considerable help from Lutheran authorities, in returning to the north. The site of modern Hopevale, 50 kilometers north of Cooktown and about twenty-five kilometers inland from the original Hope Valley, was opened and resettled in the early 1950s, as small groups of workers and later families returned from Woorabinda to clear the bush, build houses, gardens, streets, a church.

Most of the oldest Hope Valley people had died in the south during the War, and many families had been, if not entirely destroyed, reduced to only one or two members. Thus, the experience of exile and return left the community's social resources radically altered. There was also a serious shortage of marriageable women, so that groups of young men left Hopevale periodically during the fifties in search of wives, many of whom returned with their husbands from Palm Island, Bloomfield, Yarrabah, Weipa and even Woorabinda to raise their families at Hopevale. The community was also augmented by a number of Aboriginal people from south-eastern Cape York Peninsula who had Hopevale kin. Since the 1950s, Hopevale has been a fluid community, with people spending long periods in the south (as part of a Lutheran effort to relocate Hopevale families in the wider context of Queensland towns), young men working away from the mission, and with increased Hopevale participation in the state-wide networks of Aboriginal social life and movement. Missionary Schwarz's carefully constructed isolation for his Hope Valley congregation was irrevocably dismantled at Hopevale.

Language continued to be an issue at Hopevale. The spouses and other newcomers to the community brought their own linguistic repertoires with them, both augmenting their skills by learning Guugu Yimidhirr as it suited them, and contributing their own speech varieties — bits and pieces of other Aboriginal languages, various Cape York pidgin/creole varieties and habits of speech from rural stations elsewhere on the Peninsula — to the already complex inventory available to Hopevale people.

The same tension we have already met, between English and Guugu Yimidhirr, still cast as an absolute opposition, reappeared in early official deliberations by Lutheran authorities. It seemed useful and progressive for English to be a full vehicle for communication at Hopevale, but at the same time there lingered doubts about its adequacy, compared to Guugu Yimidhirr, in reaching Hopevale hearts. Throughout the fifties, pastors at Hopevale them-

⁵⁰ Schwarz 1946.

⁵¹ Wenke letter to Reuther, 5 June 1946, LCA 312:513 Box 4.

⁵² Jarrett (schoolteacher) letter to Reuther, 26 June 1946, LCA 312:513 Box 4. Also, Wenke letter to Reuther, 14 July 1947, LCA 312:13 Box 4 Tape LKH 1 p.6 207-217.

Contrary to popular belief, these children have more trouble in mastering English than Maths. The teaching of English to them is arduous work. In their homes, their native language is used almost exclusively [. . .] At school I encourage them to use English only, as the persistent use of their language is a barrier to them ever learning Grammar. ⁶⁰

She had high hopes for a new reading program which allowed her Grade 1 pupils to out-read the Grade 4s despite 'the poor knowledge of English these children have when they first begin school.'⁶¹

Nonetheless, Pastor Albrecht reports, after a visit to Hopevale from July 7th to July 30th, 1964, that the language problem has solved itself.

I have heard their elders pray with the pastor prior to the commencement of the service in Church, and for about two weeks, when I had two periods of lessons with them and each lesson was started with a prayer by one of the elders or one of the evangelists, I have been impressed how they did pray and pour out their hearts before God, in English [. . .] I feel, therefore, if these people would go back in their School and Church work to their own language this would be a step backwards. In Church the Gospel for the Sunday is read by one of the elders in Koko Yimidir, and I have heard them sing some hymns in their language, otherwise they have entirely switched over to English [. . .] It would certainly be a good thing if the missionary would speak Koko Yimidir; it would be a great help in private counselling. However, officially I think the use of English is entirely adequate and will be a help for them to fit into some community in which, as we hope, they will find their place eventually. ⁶²

Thus, by 1964, the Lutheran authorities tried by administrative policy to resolve the struggle between English and Guugu Yimidhurr – still conceived as monolithic opposites. English was proclaimed the winner. Despite later worries about the role of Guugu Yimidhurr in church and community life,⁶³ mission policy took essentially this form when my family and I first visited Hopevale in 1971.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Lemberg report on HV school, 31 December 1960, LCA 60's and 70's No.6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Albrecht report to HVMB re visit, 7-30 July 1964, LCA 60's and 70's No.1. Albrecht also had doubts about the SIL linguists because they were Baptists.

⁶³ Pohiner, report to HVMB on a trip to Coen, 7-16 June 1969 (LCA 60's and 70's No.3), mentions that people seem to have considerable trouble reading the old Guugu Yimidhurr orthography, and expresses the hope that the linguistic work being done at Bloomfield can be extended to Hopevale. '[. . .] if we are to do anything about enlarging the hymnal, translating all the Gospels for the Church Year for the benefit of the people spiritually, and as helping to preserve the culture and the language of our people (which I consider important), it is necessary that we start off on the right foot'.

⁶⁴ Doubts persisted, however, and by the end of the 1970s, the HVMB was actually looking to me for ideas about a cultural and linguistic resource center at Hopevale: Kirsch report on visit to Hopevale and Wujal Wujal, 23 November 1979, LCA 60's and 70's No.5.

The second point about the nature of the Hopevale speech community is related to the first. Just as there is no uniform biographical profile for Hopevale residents, and no standard or 'traditional' linguistic repertoire, neither is there a simple opposition between two monolithic language varieties: standard full Guugu Yimidhirr on the one hand, and some sort of standard Hopevale English on the other. Even without considering the complex mechanisms by which the languages may be combined and shuffled, within both English and Guugu Yimidhirr there exist discriminable varieties and registers. Even people who control what Hopevale people sometimes call 'deep' Guugu Yimidhirr often speak the language 'just lightly': that is, with simple common words and uncomplicated syntax. People are similarly likely to switch in one breath from something that sounds to my ears like standard Queensland rural English to something that sounds much more like Torres Strait Creole, or pan-Queensland Aboriginal English.

A simple example may be in order here. Former residents of Hope Valley point out that Missionary Schwarz had no tolerance for what he regarded as the 'broken English' of Aboriginal society outside the mission. He insisted, instead, that his pupils learn what people now call 'proper English.' Indeed, outsiders often comment that elderly Hopevale residents speak elegant, somewhat archaic, English. Such people are proud of their mastery of English⁶⁷ and somewhat disparaging of the Aboriginal English spoken at Coen, Lockhart or Bamaga. This same pride, interestingly, carries over into the common device by which English loanwords are incorporated into Guugu Yimidhirr sentences. The normal device for importing an English transitive verb into the Aboriginal language is first to 'pidginise' it by adding the pidgin transitivity suffix *-em*. One can say:

nganhi gurra *visit-em-gurray*
 1sg+ACC again 'visit'-TR-do+PAST.
 (He) visited me.

Or even

dhana *fill-em-up-gurraayga*.
 3pl+NOM 'fill up'-TR-do+PAST+HABITUAL.
 They used to fill (something) up.

Some careful speakers, especially those who have the ability to use more 'correct' varieties of English, often will use such forms, but also will correct or upgrade their English, *even when they are speaking Guugu Yimidhirr*. That is, they will substitute the more elegant-sounding formative *-it* as the transitivity marker in place of *-em*. Thus, I have recorded the following sentences:

nyulu *water-it-gurranhu* *vegetable-ngay*
 3sg+NOM 'water'-TR-do+PURP 'vegetable'-PL.
 He wants to water the vegetables.

dig-it-out-gurray
 'dig out'-TR-do+PAST.
 (She) dug (something) out.

⁶⁷ Some also admit that they feel that English, too, has a 'deep' side which they cannot fathom. My collaborator, the artist Tuio Gordon, has often remarked to me that when English speakers get together and start talking in this 'deep' language, he knows that he will not be able to follow the discussion, and takes relieved refuge in his deafness.

By 'traditional language' Pym understands the range of lexical, morphological and syntactic devices I elicited from accomplished Guugu Yimidhirr speakers and described in Haviland 1979a. In fact, Pym's method was to use as her corpus a collection of the English free glosses for a variety of Guugu Yimidhirr sentences in that grammatical sketch, which she presented to her informants, asking them to render them *back* into Guugu Yimidhirr. Deviations from the 'original' Guugu Yimidhirr forms she interprets as changes in the modern language.⁷⁰ Cases where English words appear in the re-translations, Pym interprets as instances of 'loss', offering a series of possible rationales to explain such loss: English specific words, she suggests, replace more general Guugu Yimidhirr words; Guugu Yimidhirr words that are 'too hard to say' are replaced by their allegedly more pronounceable English equivalents; and so on.

On the other hand, I maintain that all speakers at Hopevale, both young and old, employ elements from both Guugu Yimidhirr and different varieties of English, in a wide range of contexts, both at home and at large, both formal and informal, and with different sorts of interlocutors and audiences. To support this claim I will let Hopevale people speak to the issue for themselves, by presenting several fragments of recorded natural conversation.

Is it true that younger people are no longer acquiring Guugu Yimidhirr? Not trusting my own observations, I interviewed my two daughters, aged seven and fifteen during their most recent visit to Hopevale in late 1984.⁷¹ The younger reported that, in the two houses where she spent the most time, one family never spoke to each other in Guugu Yimidhirr (although I myself speak to both parents, people in their late forties, in both English and Guugu Yimidhirr); whereas in the other, her playmates *always* talked to each other in Guugu Yimidhirr, only occasionally making allowances for my daughter's limited knowledge of the Aboriginal language. My fifteen-year-old daughter, heavily involved in Hopevale teenage society (and a fluent speaker of Hopevale English) made the following observations:

Her friends use Guugu Yimidhirr for 'talking about the bush' and also for 'swearing' and 'typical expressions — words they use a lot.'

Guugu Yimidhirr, that is, is *topically* appropriate. It is also *contextually* appropriate:

down at the creek [where kids go to swim on hot afternoons], they use it [Guugu Yimidhirr] a lot more.

My older daughter drew the same contrast between the two families that my younger daughter mentioned: one spoke very little Guugu Yimidhirr between themselves (in her presence), whereas the other spoke very little else. Finally, she commented that one of her friends, an unmarried girl of almost twenty, 'could use the proper word'; that is, she could correct an inappropriate bit of Guugu Yimidhirr usage, and occasionally did so in talking with her mates. These impressions suggest to me that 'prestige', a notion perhaps less slippery than usual in

⁷⁰ There is no doubt that Guugu Yimidhirr, like all languages, is changing, and some of these changes are documented in Haviland 1979a (see, for example, section 3.5.1, p.85). However, I have strong suspicions that such 'changes' as the alleged loss of vowel length or of catalytic superimposed genitive constructions simply represent Pym's inadequate understanding of Guugu Yimidhirr syntax and morphology. For example, *bīni* 'die+PAST', in modern Guugu Yimidhirr, still contrasts with *bīnii* 'die+NONPAST', despite Pym's claim that '[t]here was some confusion as to which syllable should be lengthened (p.159)'.

⁷¹ My daughters have spent a total of more than three years at Hopevale since we recommenced our research there in 1976, and I think their observations are at least as interesting as those of, say, 'two women who gave some sentences on condition they were not identified' (Pym 1984, p.153).

- 26: and then the white man gonna say
 27: yeah, we gave the Aboriginal their rights and
 everything
 28: look what they doing with it
 29: they just making a muck of it
 30: and
 31: it has been said before
 32: and
 33: let's not get them to say it again
 34: every time
 35: a responsibility was given to *bama*
 [Aboriginal person]
 36: they destroyed it

[The speaker now begins a short illustrative tale, gradually slipping into an informal English, and then into Guugu Yimidhirr.]

- 37: and I can tell you many instances
 38: in Aurukun, young fella
 39: very bright young fella
 40: could run the store
 41: white fella said right
 42: he good man
 43: he can run the store for us
 44: all right
 45: started off good
 46: but you know what happens in our community
 47: you know
 48: this young fella had
 49: *nyulu had mugay*
 [he had a paternal uncle]
 50: *nyulu had gami*
 [he had a grandfather]
 51: *nyulu had muguurgarr*
 [he had maternal uncles]
 52: *dhuwaaygarr*
 [friends]
 53: they used to come hey!
 54: I got no money
 55: you let
 56: I'll book-'em, eh?
 [i.e., 'book' on credit.]
 57: all right
 58: book-em-*gurraayga*
 [they used to book (things)]
 59: *gami gadaayga*
 [Grandfather used to come]

otherwise Guugu Yimidhirr narrative with English comments and dialogue for both rhetorical and dramatic effect. For example, he 'quotes' his own spoken words as opposed to his thoughts (contrasts lines 22-24 with 27-33); in this context — a fight with an English speaking interlocutor — he also uses language shifts to distinguish protagonists. Moreover, he expresses in English some contextual information which belongs most appropriately to English discourse, or which would be difficult to express in Guugu Yimidhirr (lines 18-19, for example).

The story tells of a time in the 1950s when the narrator and a companion ran away from a stock job in the bush north of Hopevale. They walked, with no food and almost no water, for three days, to reach home. Their departure was the result of a fight with white stockmen that arose after the Hopevale men had asked for an early distribution of their tobacco rations.⁷⁴

[Fragment 2: a fight at Wakooka station, Hopevale Mission, 3 October 1984. D tells his interlocutors (all men from forty to seventy years of age) about a fight he had on a stock job when he was a young man. Some of the Hopevale men on the station had run out of tobacco, and wanted a further issue one day in advance of normal ration day, prompting a fight with some white stockmen.]

- 2 d; nyulu R** -nda waaday R** said (to me).
 3sNOM R** -ERG say -PAST
 3 nyun-eh?
 you, hey!
 4 you ask old Shea

[Here D starts reporting R**'s speech in English, but switches to Guugu Yimidhirr in his dramatic portrayal.]

- 5 j; aaa=
 6 d; =nyundu dhaabanga-la nhangu ngaigal-ngu You ask him for tobacco.
 2sNOM ask-IMP 3sACC tobacco-FURP
 7 nganhdhaan run out We have run out.
 1pINOM
 8 j; aaa
 [
 9 r; but that fella he-

⁷⁴ This and the following conversational transcripts are excerpted from fully transcribed tape-recordings. For each line containing Guugu Yimidhirr formatives, I show the original spoken words (1st line), followed by morpheme-by-morpheme glosses (2nd line), followed by a free English gloss sometimes set in a separate column to the right for clarity. Names of speakers and other people mentioned have been abbreviated. The symbols '{' and '*' mark overlaps, where two or more speakers talk simultaneously. The '=' links two utterances that follow each other directly without an intervening pause. Three dots enclosed in square brackets [. . .] indicate that lines have been deleted from the transcript at this point.

- 29 j; aa
- 30 d; any chance
- 31 ration day tomorrow, see
- 32 j; aaa
- 33 d; this one day before
- 34 j; mmm
- 35 d; dhana yinharrin wangarr guli gada-y But these white fellows got
 3pNOM these white man angry come-PAST angry then.
 gurra
 and
 [. . .]
- 42 d; n- not ration day for these fellas
 [. . .]
- 47 d; yarrba gurra-y That's what they said.
 this way say-PAST
- 48 ngayu gaimba wangarr-gal gurra-y So then I said to the white
 1sNOM also white man-ADESS say-PAST fellows:
- 49 eh
- 50 you- you payin for that smokes?
- 51 no
- 52 well we payin for the smokes
- 53 j; [mmm
 [. . .]
- 56 d; wouldn't hurt if we get it the day before
 [After a while a fist fight broke out, and D describes it in Guugu Yimidhirr.]
- 1 d; gundaadhi gurra so we had a fight.
 hit-REFL†PAST also
- 2 wali dhanaan gunda-y I gave them a good beating.
 around 3pIACC hit-PAST
- 3 j; haaa
 [But the white antagonist demands new weapons.]
- 4 d; mmm
- 5 I can't fight with the knuckle!
- 6 fight with a stick
- 7 ma ganaa Ok, that'll be fine!
 alright! alright
- 8 j; mmm

11 c; []
 I'll be glad to sleep on my own
 bed tonight

[T urges the others to hurry up, because he is worried about getting across a muddy place on the river.]

12 t; ma hurry up =
 Hey! Hurry up

13 bama nganhdhaan wanto cross-em gurra-nhu We want to cross that whatsits-
 man 1pINOM want to do-PURP name . . .
 ngaanaarru
 whatchamacallit
 =[

14 c; eeh

15 t; crossing muddy crossing
 (cross that) muddy crossing.

16 l; []
 dagu nganhdhaan cross-it gurra-] Well, we want to cross (the river)
 thing 1pINOM do-NONP (or) we'll have to camp there.

17 c; []
 allright

[L responds to T's urgings (and uses an 'up-graded' version of the English *cross-it*). Then she switches to English to make a bantering riposte to her daughter C's remark at line 11 above.]

18 l; you won't be saying lovely bed
 because I'm going to sleep there behind
 [. . .]

21 c; more tea in there?

22 l; wash that thing out first

23 yarra nhanu camera ga! Hey, over there is your camera!
 that 1sACC VOC

[The last remark, in Guugu Yimidhirr, was addressed to *me*.]

24 c; maaaa, babaa!
 mother father

25 yii half of the thing gotta go in that thing there
 here

26 d; ehñ, nhangu yii Hey, his thing is here.
 3sGEN here

27 ngaanaarru camera-ngu His thing for the camera.
 whatchamacallit

In this passage, speakers of both ages seem to use both English and Guugu Yimidhirr, and one of the few discernable patterns in the selection of language is neither topical nor contex-

- 17 b; Brisbane
- 18 j; ngaanii?
why?
- 19 m; hey can't get job here, nothing
- 20 b; they could be
- 21 { hospital-bi ganaa (they) could (get a job some-
hospital-LOC alright place like) in a hospital.
- 22 j; { dhanangan
3p1GEN
- 23 dhananganh nambal social wanhdharra? What about their (getting)
3p1GEN money how money from Social Security?
- 24 m; social they still get social
- [B at line 25 uses both English and Guugu Yimidhirr verbs.]
- 25 b; still get maanaarna They still — they still are getting
getting it.
[...]
- 32 m; we still get that nambal
money
- 33 nhayun dhana split-em-up gurra-l They just split that money up,
that+ABS 3pNOM do-NONP see?
nhaa-dhi
see-PAST
- 34 social money
- 35 to us
- 36 nganhdhanun
1p1GEN
(That's) ours.
- 37 j; but what about these gabiir-gabiir, no job?
girl-REDUP
- 38 and social wanhdharra?
how
- 39 m; nhayun dhanaan still They still (get) that
that+ABS 3p1ACC
- 40 they still on social
{
- 41 b; still maanaarna They still are getting it.
getting
- 42 j; still maanaa (oh), they still get it.
get

[Fragment 5: a word game, Hopevale 14 August 1979. M and Co are cousins, both about 9 or 10.]

- 1 m; say it, say 'not me'
- 2 co; not me
- 3 m; you sleepin with me
- 4 say 'not me'
- 5 co; not me
- 6 sleepin with me
- 7 m; just say 'not me'
- 8 co; not me
- 9 m; you sleepin with me tonight
- 10 say 'october'
- 11 co; october
- 12 m; say 'dunhu'
husband
- 13 co; *dunhu*
- 14 *yil nhamu* This one is yours.
here 2sACC
- 15 m; you my *dunhu*
- 16 co; ha ha

In the following short sequence, recorded in the kitchen of our household on the same day, Co tries to tell tales about uncle Ca (a boy one year his senior) for teasing and, probably, hitting another child S. Much of the commentary, both by Ca and by the other children (B and M are two girls of about ten), is in Guugu Yimidhirr. Moreover, the kids indulge in a bit of further linguistic play revolving around the word *ngambaayngu* which is used in 'deep' Guugu Yimidhirr to mark an action as done 'unconsciously, unawares, stealthily, or in secret' — a word which none of them is quite sure how to pronounce.

[Fragment 6: telling tales on a cousin's misdeed, Hopevale 14 August 1979.]

- 1 co; =Grampa
- 2 you know what Ca**** bin do
- 3 he bin teasin uh S*****
- 4 m; guya guya guya No no no!
not not not
- 5 co; yeah, you ask S*****
- 6 ca; | I did not!
guya ga
not VOC
- 7 b; Yeah, Grampa

[Fragment 7: being sick at boarding school. Recorded 14 August 1979, at Hopevale Mission. Lo is a youth of about 15, and L his fifty-five year old mother. C is a ten-year-old nephew, listening in. L had been ill, and had been confined to his dormitory, unable to go to class or to go out.]

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | l; ngali L***
1duNOM | L*** and I (were both kept in sick). |
| 2 | c; he he | |
| 3 | l; wanhunda
who-ERG | Who (did it, i.e., kept you in while sick)? |
| 4 | lo; Miss X. | |
| 5 | When I | |
| 6 | nyulu bin gammon sleep
3sNOM pretend | She was pretending to sleep. |
| 7 | and I bin get up | |
| 8 | go outside | |
| 9 | soon 's I bin go nyulu bin start now
3sNOM | As soon as I left, then she started up. |
| 10 | and nyulu bin standing up on the bed
3sNOM | and she was standing up on the bed. |
| | [...] | |
| 12 | L*** was lookin at my | |
| 13 | ngaabaay
head | |
| 14 | l; wuuguul-dhirr?
louse-COMIT | Did you have lice? |
| 15 | lo; too much | |
| 16 | c; ngaanaa?
what? | |
| 17 | lo; mm | |
| 18 | and | and we've got |
| 20 | yii nyulu
here 3sNOM | She was (standing) here. |
| 21 | we didn't | |
| 22 | I bin go sleep | |
| 23 | nyulu bin come
3sNOM | And she came. |
| 24 | in that bed | |

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